Down with the Sultan, long live the Balkan Federation!

Georgi Khadzhiev

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Translator's note

Macedonia and Thrace, 1903. The Ottoman Turkish empire was in a state of decay. For centuries the authorities had ruled with a firm hand, imposing taxes and other obligations but in most cases allowing subjects to speak their own language and practice their own religion. Now, however, was a time of crisis. The borders of the Empire were being forced back, and Ottoman rule became increasingly harsh and arbitrary. The spectre of liberation struggles haunted the dwindling Ottoman possessions in the southern Balkans. Uprising followed brutally quenched uprising, as it had for generations. But now it seemed the hour had come: imbued with the spirit of justice and equality alive in their towns and village communities, peasants and artisans banded together to free themselves from the dual evils of feudal servitude and Turkish occupation - for the rebels these sources of oppression were synonymous. It seems the large Slavic population in Macedonia and Thrace looked on the principality of Bulgaria, which had received a good deal of autonomy from the Ottoman empire in 1878, as a kind of patron in its anti-Ottoman struggle. Bulgaria was also of logistical significance for the revolutionaries in Macedonia and Thrace - they procured weapons there and manufactured explosives to be used in acts of sabotage in areas under direct Turkish rule. Later, when the uprisings were being brutally quenched, the predominantly Slavic rebels were to appeal in desperation to Bulgaria to intervene militarily… These uprisings bear comparison with the later struggle of the Makhno movement in the Ukraine (1918-1921), though they were less successful.

This piece is an excerpt from the book "National Liberation and Libertarian Federalism" (Natsionalnoto osvobozhdeniye i bezvlastniyat federalizum) by Georgi Khadzhiev, published by ARTIZDAT-5 in Sofia in 1992. It deals with the St Elijah's Day uprising in Macedonia in 1903 and the Transfiguration uprising launched in solidarity a short time later in Thrace. Khadzhiev looks at the short blossoming of libertarian communalism, as well the consequences of the uprisings and the historical lessons that can be drawn from them. This piece - about a quarter of Khadziev's book on the topic - does not pretend to be an in-depth discourse on the theory of libertarian communalism or national liberation. Rather, it focuses on the historical events themselves which have scarcely been dealt with in the English-language anarchist press, and leaves the evaluation of their relevance open to the anarchist movement today.

The author, Georgi Khadziev , was born in the first decade of the 20th century. An agricultural engineer by training, he was a veteran of the Bulgarian anarchist movement and was acquainted with many of the key figures of Bulgarian and European anarchism. When the Stalinists seized power after World War II Khadzhiev was forced into exile where he remained for 40 years, living in Western Europe. After the changes in the East Bloc in 1989 he returned to Bulgaria and was able to continue his work, publishing some of his forty books there. He died in 1996 at the age of ninety.

W.F. (translator)

The St Elijah's Day Uprising in Macedonia

The St Elijah's Day (Ilinden) uprising of 1903 is of prime significance in the history of the revolutionary movement in Macedonia, be it in terms of the number of participants, its duration and its level of organization, or be it in terms of its repercussions in the Ottoman empire and beyond.

As such it deserves greater attention in the history of the anti-Ottoman liberation struggles in Macedonia and Thrace.

This presentation of the events and their background does not pretend to be a complete study of the revolutionary movement of the time. Many authors have written about the St Elijah's Day uprising and it has been well studied. But interest in the revolutionary events of 1903 has been focussed almost exclusively on the St Elijah's Day uprising - it is often forgotten that the uprising in Thrace at Transfiguration (Preobrazheniye) was inseparably connected with the uprising in Macedonia since it was launched in solidarity with the uprising in Macedonia and with the full agreement of the movement's leadership.

Because of this deficit more attention is given here to the Transfiguration uprising. Our aim is to show and to further study the involvement of anarchists in the revolutionary movement. The Transfiguration uprising, whose main leader was the anarchist Mikhail Gerdzhikov, provides a fuller and more accurate picture of the libertarian spirit of the movement as a whole.

When dealing with an uprising or a revolution it is not correct to only view the period of decisive struggles between the antagonistic forces. Every revolution and every uprising is preceded by a range of interconnected developments. This calls for a comprehensive study of the entire pre-revolutionary period, of all the events and preconditions which gave rise to the revolution or uprising. This cannot be done here in full scholarly depth because, as mentioned, we have set ourselves other goals.

Let me begin with the events on the eve of the uprising. At the congress of the revolutionary movement of the Bitola region of Macedonia held in the village of Smilovo the decision was taken to launch a limited-scale uprising based on guerilla tactics - the idea of a full-scale popular insurrection was rejected. The congress was a truly democratic gathering. 32 delegates were present at the start, and their number increased to 50 by the end of the congress. The first point of the agenda was hearing and discussing reports from different districts of Macedonia on the state of preparations for an uprising. The majority of delegates was against launching a fully-fledged uprising because, in their view, the people were not prepared. Damyan Gruyev, who chaired the congress, declared the question of the uprising to have been resolved affirmatively and proceeded to the next point of the agenda - that of practical preparations for the limited form of uprising chosen. As the delegates were of the view that a streamlined, well-functioning organization had not yet been constructed and the population was not yet well armed enough to launch a full-scale uprising, it was decided that guerilla tactics should be used. Militias were formed in the regions where the uprising was to take place and were to operate according to a plan elaborated in advance without the involvement of the civilian population. For larger-scale operations the militias were to be capable of dividing up into smaller units; this would also make it easier for them to be supplied with food and to go underground. In each of the revolutionary movement's operational regions power was vested in a so-called "Rebel Command", the leadership of the militia. Coordination offices were set up in the towns and cities for information exchange and to facilitate better organization and supply. Regions were divided into sub-regions. Rebels who were junior and senior army officers were appointed by the congress to give military instruction to the rebel coordinators in each region. A "Disciplinary Statute of the Uprising" was elaborated by Boris Sarafov, an officer of the reserve, and Nikola Dechev, a junior reserve officer. The congress elected a General Staff comprising Damyan Gruyev, Boris Sarafov and A. Lozanchev - with G. Popkhristov, P. Atsev and L. Poptraykov as deputies if required - which was to guide the prepa-

rations for the uprising and lead the uprising itself. In agreement with the Central Committee the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) and with other regions the General Staff was also given the task of setting the date for the uprising under the condition that it not be before mid July so that adequate preparations be made and food supplies stockpiled.

Immediately after the Smilovo congress Gruyev and Sarafov went on a tour of inspection of the Bitola region with a their so-called staff unit of 20 men commanded by Dechev. They went from the Ohrid district to the Resen, Kostur and Demikhasar districts, resolving local conflicts and misunderstandings, and appointed people in charge of ensuring adequate organization of the rebels and securing supplies of weapons, food, salt, medicines and other essentials.

It should be emphasized that a large proportion of the guns and other military equipment used during the uprising were got from the Turks, mainly taken from Turkish army storehouses and barracks. Military preparations for the uprising were so involved that the rebels even conducted maneuvers among themselves with two "sides", one led by Dechev and the other by Stoykov, a lieutenant of the reserve.

The original intention had been to launch the uprising in the spring of 1903, but at a meeting of revolutionary activists in Sofia in January of that year it had became clear that it would have to be postponed. When the next congress took place at Petrova Niva from 28th-30th June 1903 it was clear that the precise date of the uprising in Macedonia would be 10th July. Since the revolutionary movement in the Odrin region of Thrace[1] was still not ready for the uprising, Gerdzhikov was delegated by telegraph to request a postponement of the beginning of the uprising to August, which was accepted.

In agreement with the Central Committee of the IMRO and the exile office in Sofia the General Staff in Macedonia laid down the date of the uprising to be 20th July (in the old Julian calendar: 2nd August) - the religious festival of St Elijah, which was to give its name to the uprising. The decision was communicated to the people on 15th July and sent out to the revolutionary movement in all districts. The secret was kept successfully until the very last moment and when the uprising broke out the Turkish authorities were taken by surprise.

The Central Committee of the IMRO issued a declaration circulated widely by its representatives abroad explaining its actions to the Great Powers and to the Bulgarian and foreign press: "The unrestrained violence of the Mohammedans and the systematic oppression by the authorities have driven the Christian population of Macedonian and Thrace to resort to armed self-defense. All peaceful means of conflict resolution have been exhausted. We call on the rest of Europe to intervene by way of negotiations in order to resolve the status of the population of Macedonia and Thrace… The IMRO rejects all responsibility for the uprising and declares that it will support the popular struggle until its aims have finally been achieved. We are aware of our duty and this gives us strength, as it does to know that we enjoy the sympathy of the civilized world."[2]

In its declaration the General Staff emphasized: "We are taking up arms against tyranny and inhumanity; we are fighting for freedom and humanity; our cause is thus higher than any national or ethnic differences. Therefore we express our solidarity with all others who suffer in the Sultan's

[1] The Odrin region, as it is referred to in Bulgarian, is located around the town of Odrin (its Turkish name is Edirne, its Greek name Andrinopolis). It is now located in Turkey. The Odrin region is synonymous with Eastern Thrace - the region between the River Maritsa, which today forms the border between Greece and Turkey, and the Black Sea. (Trans.)

[2] Makedonia i Odrinsko (1893-1903). Memoar na Vutreshnata organizatsia. Sofia, 1904, p. 119.

dark Empire. Today it is not only the whole Christian population which suffers, but ordinary Turkish villagers as well. Our only enemies are the Turkish authorities, those who use arms against us, betray us, or who carry out acts of retaliation against helpless old people, women and children rather than against us, the rebels. We will fight these enemies and avenge all wrongs!..."[3]

On the day of the uprising the members of the General Staff met up in the hills high above Smilovo with the local rebels. Before all of those gathered there - peasants and artisans, teachers and officers - the village priest blessed the red flag. Towards evening bells were rung and bales of hay set ablaze to signal the start of the uprising. After three days of fighting and a siege from 23rd July, Smilovo was taken by the rebels and converted into an armed base. The population of about 2,000 moved up into the nearby hills and built huts, set up kitchens and made itself ovens. Food supplies and medical services were organized. The entire population renounced private property.

In the Bitola area, where the revolutionary movement was numerically strongest, best organized and best armed, seven different locations were targeted in the first night of the uprising and in the days that followed. Attacks were launched on barracks and police stations, bridges on the main road from Bitola to Resen were blown up, telegraph lines were cut, and all the Governor's towers were set on fire. The rebels' tactics were closely linked to the endeavour to not endanger the civilian population and to make economical use of weapons. At this stage of the uprising casualties were mainly among the Turks.

The uprising was most successful in Krushevo - a town with a mixed population of Bulgarians[4], Greeks and Aromanians[5]. In the night of the 20th July and the early hours of the 21st July the town was surrounded and attacked by 800 rebels. It fell quickly. The bells of the town's three churches rang as Turkish resistance was mopped up, and at daybreak only 60 Turkish troops still offered resistance, surrounded in the barracks. Government institutions were taken over and the people of the town were in a mood of exultation. "God bless our freedom!" they cried jubilantly.

On 22nd and 23rd a detachment of Turkish troops and bashi-bazouks made an unsuccessful attempt to retake Krushevo. On 22nd July the "Rebel Command" headed by the Socialist and school teacher Nikola Karev descended from the hills into the town and held a meeting with influential town figures - about 60 in total - including representatives of all three ethnic groups. A six-member commission was elected comprised of two Bulgarians, Aromanians and Greeks respectively. This was a "Provisional Government" entrusted with the administration of the free city. Six departments were set up: a judiciary, a requisitions section, an administration of finances, a police force, a food supply organization and a medical service, and their operations were the responsibility of the members of the Provisional Government. A hospital was set up in the Bulgarian school and an Aromanian doctor put in charge. The saddler's workshops in the town promptly began producing peasant shoes, cartridge belts and rifle slings. A small foundry was set up for making bullets and repairing rifles and revolvers. Two mills worked around the

[3] Ibid., p. 118.

[4] Here and throughout this piece the term ”Bulgarian” is used as a blanket term to mean both ethnic Bulgarians and ethnic Macedonians - southern Slavs - as distinct from the many other ethnic groups in the geographical region of Macedonia. The degree of cultural and linguistic similarity between Macedonians and Bulgarians is very high and it was only in the second half of the 20th century with the creation of a discrete Macedonian republic within Yugoslavia that clear linguistic and cultural distinctions between ”Bulgarians” and ”Macedonians” began to emerge and be codified. So here when the author uses the term Bulgarian he often means Macedonian, unless referring directly to the autonomous Principality of Bulgaria and the majority ethnic group there. (Trans.)

[5] A small ethnic group - also called Vlachs - living in pockets in parts of the Balkans and beyond and speaking a language closely related to Romanian. (Trans.)

clock to grind wheat brought from granaries and storehouses in the mountains, which was then distributed to the population and the rebels.

The "Government" looked after the families of the former Ottoman officials, giving them separate houses and supplies of food. An appeal was sent to the Muslim villages in the vicinity, requesting them to remain neutral and stay calm. It stressed that the rebels' struggle was "for the liberation of all Macedonians regardless of nationality and faith".

Special festive services were celebrated in all three churches - Bulgarian, Greek and Aromanian. Among those who attended were members of the "Provisional Government" and the General Staff.

The same day the revolutionary court passed the death sentence on five traitors - one Bulgarian and four Greeks.

The "Krushevo Republic" was explicitly socialist in character. There was a spirit of mutual understanding between the different ethnic groups, and effective administration ensured fairness and the safety of the population while at the same time allowing full freedom. But the sun of freedom was only to shine for 10 days.

In the Demirkhisar area there were around 1,000 organized rebels. Their tasks involved burning down the Governor's towers, attacking Turkish garrisons and destroying or interrupting lines of communication. In a victorious march they took many villages and everywhere proclaimed the liberation of the enslaved population. Four of the villages which were considered safest were chosen as food supply centres - foodstuffs were put into storage there and food was prepared for the rebels and the population. Empty cartridges were refilled with gunpowder and clothing was sewn for the rebels. Detachments of men and women went from the hills down into the valleys to collect the harvest in the fields. After numerous but scattered clashes with Turkish forces a ceasefire began on 22nd July, lasting until 5th August. Contacts were established with mixed and Turkish villages and agreements were reached on mutual non-aggression.

In the Kostur area the news of the planned uprising arrived very late and spread slowly. Although it took some time for the uprising to start, it was here that it erupted on the largest scale of all. In the northern parts of the area the entire population rose up. The local rebel command took the initiative - it secured victory in the area by delivering a series of hard, decisive blows with lightning speed. The town of Klisura was in rebel hands from 23rd July to 14th August - a total of 20 days.

In the Lerin area preparations for the uprising were least adequate. There were around 500 organized rebels in this area, about 10-20 per village, and here the decision of the congress to conduct a guerilla-type uprising was carried out most faithfully. The population remained in the villages and the uprising was limited to various acts of sabotage in the first night: the telegraph lines between Lerin and Bitola were cut, road and railway bridges were destroyed, and governor's towers on the estates were set on fire. But precautionary repression by the authorities was to crush the uprising here - a hard-felt defeat.

In the Ohrid area the results of the uprising were most disappointing. On the one hand the natural inclination of the population and their resolve was favourable for an uprising. But on the other hand the proximity to Albania - which looked unfavourably upon the Macedonians - the small proportion of Bulgarians in the population in outlying areas, and the rebels' very poor level of armament discouraged the revolutionary leaders in Ohrid. The tasks agreed to under the general plan were fulfilled, but no significant military successes were achieved. When the sun rose on St Elijah's Day the town was dotted with posters in Turkish calling on the Turkish

population to remain neutral and explaining that the revolutionary struggle was not directed against it but rather against the tyranny of Ottoman rule. This helped calm the Turkish population which was very fearful of developments. The chief administrator of the area showed tolerance towards the Bulgarians and at the same time kept a tight rein on the fanatical Turkish nationalists. Thus the situation in the town remained relatively calm, but at the same time the revolutionary enthusiasm of the local revolutionary leaders in Ohrid was dampened. Acts of brutality were committed in outlying areas, which together with errors committed by the leadership limited the scale and success of the uprising. Communication lines between Ohrid and Bitola, Kichevo, Debar, Elbasan and Korcha were cut, governor's towers were set on fire, and governors, town criers and Turkish officials were caught and beaten up in the villages. In purely militarily terms the rebels were fairly well prepared - there were involved in quite a number of small armed clashes and suffered no significant casualties.

In the Kichevo area only the population of the mountainous areas participated in the uprising. The other areas were very much under the influence of Serbian propaganda and the population remained passive. Along with acts of sabotage in Kichevo there was also a large demonstration. On 20th July the city was surrounded by three rebel detachments of altogether around 500 men. With loud shouts of "hurrah" and shooting flares they sowed panic and disorder in the ranks of the Turkish troops who were encamped just out of town. Half an hour later, realizing that they were not numerous enough or sufficiently well armed to take the town, the rebels withdrew into the mountains. Their demonstrative action had succeeded in spreading fear in the Turkish-held town.

In most of the clashes in these first days of the uprising the rebels gained short-term successes due to their great mobility and the element of surprise. They operated not in small dispersed militias but in much larger units, and were nevertheless deployed with whirlwind speed.

There was no uprising in the Prilep area. This was due to its distance both from the Bulgarian border and from the provinces where supplies of weapons were largely obtained. In his study of the uprising Khristo Silyanov also identifies the behaviour of the great revolutionaries Dzhordzhe Petrov and Pere Toshev, who were in the Prilep district at the time of the uprising, as a partial explanation. A further reason was that an incident occurred before the uprising and put the Turkish troops on the alert.

On St Elijah's Day rebel militias cut the telegraph lines from Prilep to Bitola and Veles and destroyed the bridges on the roads to Grasko, Kichevo, Krushevo and Veles. On 23rd July they attacked the barracks and the town hall in one village.

In the Thessaloniki district, the largest in Macedonia and including the Thessaloniki, Sérrai and Dráma regional organizations of the revolutionary movement, the local leadership was opposed to the uprising because of disagreements - and even open hostility - between activists of the IMRO and centralists in the organization. Despite a temporary reconciliation relations remained frosty, and generally the operations conducted here were not well coordinated. It was only revolutionary militias which played an active role - the local population was advised to restrain from any particular activity and to simply help supply the revolutionaries. Most of the operations conducted were sabotage attacks, the most significant of which was the destruction of a 900m stretch of railway line and the railway bridge near Gevgelia at the end of July. The clamp-down in the district following bombings in Thessaloniki was also a significant factor in restricting the extent of the uprising here.

In the Skopje district, where the main leader was Nikola Pushkarov - later a respected Bulgarian soil scientist - the uprising mainly took the form of sabotage. On 1st August a dynamite attack caused the derailment of a military train with 32 wagons. The only exception to the pattern in this district was the area around Razlozhk, where the population actively participated in the uprising. After the quashing of the uprising the repression there was particularly severe.

In the Sérrai district the activity of the militias was of great practical significance. The militias held down a Turkish force of 20,000 troops which significantly assisted the uprising in the Bitola area - the main focus of rebel activity.

The uprising was accompanied by clashes between rebel militias and Turkish army troops, and even after the uprising was put down in September and October 1903 sporadic clashes continued through until the end of the year. At the height of the uprising a total of around 14,000-16,000 rebel fighters[6] armed with old rifles, axes, clubs and pitchforks faced a standing army of the Ottoman empire (200,000-300,000 men) with modern weaponry and equipment. Another problem was the generally poor coordination of operations and the lack of an effective joint command. The most responsible leaders of the movement foresaw such an outcome and were against launching the uprising prematurely precisely for this reason. The strategy was clear - no attacks were launched against major towns and cities, contrary to the advice of military experts. Despite their internationalist outlook, the rebels were not always able to secure the trust and assistance of people of all ethnic groups. In the liberated areas foundations were laid for a new and fairer way of life, but not everything necessary was done to protect the revolution.

In the Bitola district 746 rebels were killed in 150 clashes. In the Thessaloniki disrict there were 38 clashes and 109 rebels killed. In the Skopje district there were only 15 clashes but 93 rebel casualties. Everywhere the uprising ended in defeat, and the defeat was followed by gruesome retaliation which hit the civilian population hardest. In the four rebel operational regions - the Bitola, Thessaloniki and Skopje regions of Macedonia and the Odrin region of Thrace - more than 16 areas were affected: 201 villages were burnt down, 12,400 houses reduced to ashes. 4,694 people were massacred, 3,122 were raped, and 176 women and girls were abducted. 70,835 people were left homeless[7], and 30,000 refugees fled to the autonomous Principality of Bulgaria.

On 9th September 1903 Damyan Gruyev, Boris Sarafov and Lozanchev met to discuss the hopeless situation. They prepared a statement to the Bulgarian government which was sent to Sofia through the Bulgarian mission in Bitola. It read: "... Having been placed in leading positions of the popular movement here, we appeal to you in the name of the oppressed Bulgarian population to come to its assistance in as effective a manner a possible - through military intervention...".[8]

Ten days later the General Staff decided to cease all revolutionary activity. The rebel forces - with the exception of regular militias - were declared disbanded.

[6] Kh. Silyanov, Osvoboditelnite borbi na Makedonia, vol. 1 - Ilindenskoto vustaniye, Sofia, 1933, pp. 442-443.

[7] Makedonia i Odrinsko..., p. 182, 250.

[8] Kh. Silyanov, Osvoboditelnite borbi..., pp. 434-435

The Transfiguration Uprising and the ”Strandzha Commune” - the first libertarian commune in Bulgaria

After Gerdzhikov had fulfilled the mission entrusted to him by the congress at Petrova Niva and arranged for the uprising in Macedonia to be postponed - it was now to be called on 20th July rather than 10th July - he began organizing acts of sabotage and working to supply weapons. Under a clever pretext he persuaded his parents to leave their house in Plovdiv, after which he turned it into a central workshop for the production of time-bombs and left Vasil Paskov to see to the progress of the work in his absence.[9]

The postponement of the uprising in Macedonia was conducive to speeding up the one in Thrace. The exact date had not yet been set, but it was necessary to hurry. The limited time available - it was only five weeks between one planned uprising and the other - demanded a feverish pace of work. All the militias and their responsible members were active and worked hard in accordance with the plan agreed to at the congress. Preparations began. The villagers freely created local communes, land and livestock were made communal property. The harvest was brought in collectively by all, and then the storing and processing began - this was food for the rebels and bread for the people.[10]

In late 1902 and early 1903 in Thrace village militias, the so-called "death squads", were set up to support the work of the insurrectionary militias and those engaged in agitation. They had now got used to round-the-clock training and bivouacs in the forests and meadows of the Strandzha[11]. The specific task of this training was preparation for night-time operations. The remainder of the population - women, children and the elderly - devoted themselves to agricultural work without regard to the borders of properties. Everything was intended for communal consumption by the population and the militias. A life in real communism began. This new system was born spontaneously and naturally under the influence of libertarian ideas, its sincerity also inspired the leaders of the movement. Obviously the new order did not appeal to everyone in the rebel areas, but no-one resisted - some out of ambition, some out of newly-found enthusiasm, and others again, mainly rich farmers, because they feared the people in struggle: the people's will had now become the determining factor, and any form of coercion or brute force used against them would have been misplaced and ill-fated.

The congress at Petrova Niva took the decision to declare the uprising in Thrace not because it necessarily reckoned with success, but because it wanted to express solidarity with the uprising in Macedonia and hinder the transfer of Turkish army forces there.

Preparations were conducted everywhere, but the most significant and successful operations were to be in rebel operational region no. 1 - in the Malko Turnovo, Lozengrad and Bunarkhisar areas - where the uprising took on massive proportions. The preparatory work proceeded quietly and in great secrecy, but it involved young and old, men and women alike. Particular attention should be devoted to the participation of women who deserve commemoration for their great

[9] Strandzha is the Bulgarian name for a mountain range in Eastern Thrace, in Turkish it is called Istrancha. It runs parallel to the Black Sea coast from the far southeast of Bulgaria about half the way to Istanbul. The uprising in Thrace in 1903 was carried out with the greatest vigour here. On a ”geo-linguistic” matter: the place names given in the Bulgarian original have been conserved when the places are today part of Bulgaria. However, where today they are part of Turkey or Greece i have endeavoured to give the current Turkish or Greek form. (Trans.)

[10] Kh. Silyanov, Spomeni od Strandzha, Sofia, 1934, p. 47.

[11] In some villages permanent military camps were established and a mobilization carried out.

heroism and many brave deeds: before the uprising they brought in the harvest and also served as couriers between villages and militias. They hid and carried weapons and worked to supply food to the freedom-fighters in the villages, forests and mountains. In the entire movement there was not one case of betrayal by a woman, not even under the harshest of coercion and torture. Another great service of the women was their work in carefully designing and producing revolutionary flags, showing a fundamental dedication to the revolutionary cause.[12] Many of these unsung female heroes showed outstanding discernment and resolve, as well as self-control and resourcefulness in tight situations such as concealing people and weapons when the authorities conducted searches, or by keeping secrets under interrogation.

Another characteristic of the movement in Thrace was that there were many intellectuals in its leadership. "The majority of the movement's leaders," writes D.N. Katerinski, who in all likelihood was no anarchist, "were proponents of revolutionary direct action and were devoted to finding means and ways to liberate the people from Turkish political domination and feudal oppression."[13]

The revolutionary activists in Thrace protected their autonomy against all attempts by centralists and agents of the Bulgarian ruler Ferdinand to influence the movement, says Katerinski. The independence of the movement was "guarded by its progressive leaders", as he puts it, "who did not hesitate to put their own lives at risk if so required".

Several unforeseen events prior to the launch of the uprising threatened to betray the element of surprise before the uprising had even begun. But as it turned out the result of these events was positive - they raised the fighting spirit of the population and led to an even healthier consolidation of preparations in the lead-up to the uprising. For example, on 20th March 1903 in the village of Brashlyan Turkish forces surrounded the militia led by Pano Angelov. A battle ensued, during which the commander himself and the brave revolutionary Nikola Ravashola - a close friend of Gerdzhikov's - were killed. The Turks did not bother to bury them; the rebels then took the bodies to Malko Turnovo to be buried and the whole town came out for the funeral. The huge procession was most impressive and made a clear statement to the Ottoman authorities who were quite shocked by the widespread reverence for the fallen revolutionaries. The people devoted a song to their two dead, which became a general song of the uprising and is still sung today:

"The clear moon has now come out
Over the green forest,
In the whole Strandzha the oppressed sing
A new heroic song.
Bullets rain down on the village,
Costly blood flows in torrents,
Pano falls, Ravashola falls,

[12] Preobrazhenskoto vustaniye 1903. Sbornik..., pp. 114-137.
[13] Ibid., p. 79.

Our sons die in the forest."[14]

Another aspect of preparations for the Transfiguration uprising was the continued establishment of so-called "death squads", a task attended to by Gerdzhikov. These "death squads" in Thrace were not the same as the village militias in Macedonia. Their special task was to deal with traitors and to carry out sentences passed. Their operations brought great prestige to the organization, and during the uprising they constituted the core of the revolutionary army - they were a true expression of the people in arms, far from being a militarized instrument of any authorities.

The beginning of the St Elijah's Day uprising saw Gerdzhikov - the main leader of the Transfirguration uprising - in Bulgaria. There he entrusted Mikhail Dayev with the task of travelling to Varna and gathering new militias. Then he crossed into Turkey, travelling via Burgas and Vurgari to the small village of Golyamo Kokorafi in the Pikinkhor mountains where he met up with the other members of the "Leading Combat Body". Their meeting was from 28th-30th July, one month after the congress at Petrova Niva. Stamat Ikonomov, Lazar Madzharov and Khristo Silyanov were present. It was agreed that the uprising be launched in the night from 5th-6th August - the Christian festival of Transfiguration. In his memoirs Gerdzhikov explains: "The congress had not given us any precise mandate as to what to do - we were to lead the uprising without going into action ourselves. We found this impractical. I suggested that each of us undertake one independent action beyond the organization's main area of strength, and this idea was accepted. We left the general plan of operations to the individual commanders. They had a lot of autonomy, and only had to see to it that their attacks gave the Turks a good fright, and, when they were forced to withdraw, to first make sure that the population was safe."

Madzharov chose the village of Derinkyoy, a strategic point between Lozengrad and Malko Turnovo with a garrison of Turkish troops; Ikonomov chose the Greek village of Uzunkyoy, also the location of a garrison; and Gerdzhikov chose Vasiliko - a harbour town and district centre with two barracks.

In order that general operations be well coordinated and begin at one and the same time, in keeping with the instructions each commander was given a watch of one and the same make. Their attacks were to target military units and garrisons, watchtowers and guard-posts, police stations, the bashi-bazouks used for repression, trains and railway stations, tunnels and bridges, banks, post offices and telegraph lines. A massive explosion to destroy the lighthouse at Igneada was to signal the start the uprising. In the same night many of the village commanders in Bulgarian ethnic villages along the border had the task of burning down the Turkish border posts in the Odrin region - from the Black Sea to the River Maritsa. The Turkish soldiers were to be driven back.

In response to these demands the local commanders all announced what operations they were going to conduct. At a consultation meeting the question was also resolved of how to relate to the Turkish villages in the region. The decision was taken to burn down the villages of the Mukhadzhirs - privileged Turkish colonists - but otherwise to do no harm to the unarmed Turks or those who offered no resistance. In general the organization attempted to encourage the multiethnic character of the movement. Many Gagauzes - a Christian people speaking a Turkic language - from villages between Lozengrad and Odrin participated in the revolutionary organization.

[14] Ibid., p. 141. (This is a literal translation of the song and does not try to replicate the rhyme or rhythm of the

It was very difficult to reach consensus on one issue which was very significant at that time - whether or not to also attack Malko Turnovo. Silyanov says that three of the commanders spoke out against such an attack because there was no reliable information on the strength of enemy forces there. Thus, if an attack were unsuccessful, there was a danger that the uprising could be brought to fall by the first Turkish counter-attack. Those who advanced this argument favoured decentralized operations which were to be conducted simultaneously. Only Ikonomov - a captain of the reserve with 15 years military experience - came out in favour of a concerted attack on Malko Turnovo and argued the case long and hard. Silyanov later explained that Ikonomov had been right and the others had been wrong. Information received at a later date showed that the Turkish garrison in the town at that time was insignificant and that it would have been quite feasible to take the town with 600-700 rebels as Ikonomov had proposed.

At this stage we should make a general point: it is all too easy to pick out and condemn the mistakes of revolutionary struggles in the past. It is easy to be judgemental when we already know the outcome. But what gives us the certainty to maintain that the mistakes would not have been made if the uprising had been conducted differently? In the case at hand it was clear in advance that the uprising would be unsuccessful. The main goal was to give a clear demonstration of the will of the people, and, as far as possible, to assist the uprising in Macedonia. It should be added that although Gerdzhikov, Madzharov and Silyanov were opposed to Ikonomov's suggestion of beginning the uprising with a concerted attack on Malko Turnovo, they did not exclude the possibility of such an attack being launched at a later stage if the uprising went well and the whole of the surrounding district were taken.

"I received news that the initial operations had gone exceedingly well everywhere," Gerdzhikov explains. "I wanted to call together my comrades so as to gather forces and attack Malko Turnovo, therefore I went to the place where we could meet". Gerdzhikov did indeed leave for near Malko Turnovo and sent couriers to Madzharov and Ikonomov urging them to do the same. But the two commanders responded that they were fully occupied with local work and thus unable to come to the meeting.

What weapons were the rebels equipped with and what was the chronological development of the uprising? According to Gerdzhikov the "Leading Combat Body " relied above all on the operations of the "death squads". These were equipped with 4,000 rifles, 1,000 grenades - which was quite sufficient - and a certain number of revolvers. According to Silyanov in operational region no. 1 the rebels had around 1,100-1,200 rifles at their disposal, of which no more than 200 were good Manlikher rifles - the rest were relics from the Crimean War of 1854-1856. The Memoir of the IMRO, published after the uprising, mentions the number of rifles available as being 1,970. Atanas Razboynikov, who had experience at estimating quantities of weapons, puts the number at 1,700. It is very hard to establish the number with any degree of accuracy, but it is known that there were over 2,000 armed rebels, many of whom supplied themselves. Others took weapons from the Turks killed during clashes, so in all probability the actual figure was higher that the estimates given, but did not exceed 4,000. In any case this weaponry could not compete in terms of quality or quantity and could not ensure victory against a better organized and more numerous enemy - a standing army. Alone in operational region no. 1 there were 10,587 Turkish soldiers armed with Mauser rifles.

Another problem was coordination. While the preparations for the uprising to the east of the River Maritsa, where Gerdzhikov was the IMRO leader in charge, were essentially completed in

good time, in the region to the west of the River Maritsa under the leadership of Kosta Antonov everything lagged behind. There was something very strange about Antonov's behavior which has yet to be explained.[15] Antonov was present neither at the congress in Plovdiv, nor at the one at Petrova Niva. His task at the time of the uprising was to carry out acts of sabotage. For this purpose Kosta Nunkov was sent to assist him; Nunkov was a brave and determined anarchist, a big and strapping man who had served in the army pioneers - he was very knowledgeable about explosives and had even written a special guidebook on their use for purposes of sabotage[16]. In any case Antonov failed to fulfill his tasks time and time again - as if systematically - and also hindered Nunkov. The regional committee issued an ultimatum, demanding of Antonov that he transfer the leadership in the region to Nunkov, but Antonov did not even deign to answer. In the meantime, after the start of the uprising in Macedonia and with the number of sabotage attacks mounting, the Turkish authorities greatly increased security all along the railway route to Macedonia and it became impossible to carry out further acts of sabotage there.

On 3rd August an event occurred which was not at all anticipated in the general plan for the uprising and put the coordination of rebel operations at risk. In the village of Risovo revolutionary activists caught a tax-collector and two guards who had gone on a drunken spree and been abusing the population. The three were soon executed together with a spy, a Greek from Akhtopol. On 4th August a detachment of 30 Turkish soldiers arrived in the village of Madzhur and began evicting the inhabitants. This brought about a reaction by the rebels who surrounded the village the very same day and began attacking the soldiers. Twenty soldiers were killed and the remainder fled. According to the general plan this militia's task was to attack the villages of Igneada and Kosti, where there was a Turkish garrison, and not to do this until the day of the uprising.

The uprising in Thrace was declared in the Kladar area of rebel operational region no. 7 - in the mountain village of Kitka near Vasiliko. Gerdzhikov was there with his sabotage corps, reinforced by militias from other operational regions - Pergov (no. 5), Tsiknikhor (no. 3) and Gramatika (no. 6) - a total of 120 men.[17] All of the men grouped together around their commander and listened to his first set of instructions and a rousing speech.

"The hour has finally come," said Gerdzhikov, "the hour we have been waiting for for five hundred years, which we have been working for day and night, buying up rifles, roaming the Balkans, populating the dungeons… This evening all our brothers in blood and suffering, wherever they may be, shall pit their strength against our enemies. Wherever there are Turkish forces we shall smash them. Tonight terrible deeds must be done. Blood shall flow, heads shall roll, villages and towns shall burn. As of tonight we are no longer the oppressed infidel subjects. We do not respect

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original. Trans.)

[15] It is interesting to note how far some Communist authors have gone in their partisan appraisal. People's actions and their character are not always in accordance with their political affiliations. On the contrary - the opposite is often the case. Antonov, although a Marxist, was a fervent proponent of terrorist methods, and in his relations with others he proved to be a cruel, harsh personality. Gerdzhikov and Mandzhukov, who both knew him well from their time in Geneva, mention in passing that he was a social-democrat. Nikola Sotirov, a Communist, whose book on the Transfiguration uprising is otherwise quite objective, clearly finds Antonov's behaviour embarrassing but goes on to call him a Communist.

[16] "Rukovodstvo za upotrebata na izbukhlivi veshtestva i nachinut na razrusheniyata", published in 1902.

[17] Kh. Silyanov, Spomeni od Strandzha, p. 58. The following figures are given: 120 rebels, of whom 20 were armed with Manlikhers, 5-6 with old Berdana rifles and Martinkas, and around one hundred with rifles from the Crimean War; the rebels were joined by 20-30 charcoal burners - Macedonians armed with axes and knives.

the Muslim laws, the viziers, the army, we shall pay no taxes and duties. Now it is us who shall set the laws, elect the judges and control the army in these lands! Every Turk shall be greeted not with the customary Muslim greeting but with knife and bullet until our land is purged of the enemy, or until they submit to our way and begin to live a new life, no longer as overlords and oppressors, but as peace-loving Thracians with equal rights and responsibilities. Those of you here who feel fear in your hearts should leave now while there is still time, because when we set off from here there is no going back! We are not fighting for ourselves but for our wives and children, for the generations to come!"[18]

On 6th August 1903 at 1.30 am the rebel militia moved off towards Vasiliko. Twenty rebels approached the government offices there, while another detachment went into the Turkish quarter. Five or six rebels took up position on the road between the old and the new parts of the town, and the rebels armed only with axes were to cut the telegraph lines. Forty rebels, including Varnaliyev and Karcho, followed Gerdzhikov to the two Turkish garrisons where there were 500 and 300 troops respectively. Of the forty rebels only fifteen were actually members of the militia, the remainder were rebel villagers with little or no training.

The rebels reached their intended targets without being noticed. Each of them was equipped with 2 or 3 hand-grenades which they now readied. As planned, a Russian who had joined the militia more or less by chance in Burgas threw the first grenade, and this explosion was the signal for the others to be thrown.

At that moment the whole Strandzha range was lit up by spotlights. This was a remarkable coincidence. A Russian naval squadron had dropped anchor just off the harbour at Igneada. It had steamed up close to the Turkish coast to put on a show of force in response to the assassination in Bitola, Macedonia, of the Russian consul, Rostovtsev, two days after the proclamation of the St Elijah's Day uprising there. The tales regarding the assassination are most varied, but in any case it gave courage to the rebels.

The attack on Vasiliko ended in success. Most of the Turkish soldiers and civilian population fled the town and took to sea in row-boats, but Silyanov's detachment captured several high-ranking Turkish officers and officials: Mehmed Ali, a naval officer; Arif, the Postmaster General; Hamid, the head of the harbour authority; and Lieutenant Haidar, Chief of Police. These were the top-level Ottoman authorities in the town. Gerdzhikov received them with dignity and compassion. He explained to them the reasons for the uprising: "The Sultan's regime is ruinous for all subjects of the Empire, and the insecurity it causes equally affects the Christian population and all Muslims who long for peace and wish to live from their own labour..."[19] He returned the officials their confiscated possessions and asked them what they would prefer - to be set free immediately, or to be escorted to Bulgaria. The high-ranking prisoners were stirred by this generosity and, after prolific expressions of gratitude, chose Bulgaria.

The next morning a delegation of the Greek section of the population came to see Gerdzhikov, bringing gifts and provisions. They sought advice on how now to organize their administration and what flag they should raise. Gerdzhikov answered that they had to solve those questions themselves - that they should set up the kind of administration which they considered suitable and should raise whatever flag they wanted at the harbour. The reasons for the uprising were

[18] Kh. Silyanov, ibid., and also: Belezhki po Preobrazhenskoto vustaniye v Odrinsko, 1903, Sofia, Poligrafiya, 1934, p. 59.

[19] Kh. Silyanov, Spomeni od Strandzha, p. 75.

communicated to the population and the Greeks elected their own "Provisional Government" which was responsible to the revolutionary command. In general this was the course of development in the other areas of operational region no. 1.

Now that Vasiliko was taken and the Turkish army driven out, Gerdzhikov and his militia left the town and went to tour the other areas of the district. Their entry into the village of Vurgari, which had already been liberated, was a grand celebration. The whole population came out into the village square and showered the militia with ovations and expressions of joy.

In the Peneka area which included the villages of Yatros and Sergen, the task of the local militias was to cut the telegraph and telephone lines. In the night from 5th-6th August the "death squad" in Peneka successfully fulfilled its task of driving the Turkish police out of the village and attacking the army detachment located in the village of Apartas. In the Veliko area, consisting of the villages of Bunarkhisar, Maglayik, Kurudere, Urumbeglia, Yana, Chongara, Satukyoy, as well as Veliko from the Malko Turnovo district, the rebels' task was to attack the Turkish garrison in the Greek village of Inzhekyoy in the Vizitsa area in order to prevent the garrison from intervening in the uprising in the district. Ikonomov was directly in charge of these operations. The attacks were launched exactly at the designated time, but because they were not fully successful Ikonomov gave the order for the rebels to withdraw. The garrison, however, was cut off and paralyzed and was not involved in combating the uprising. After withdrawing the militia set off towards Veliko where it split into two detachments and conducted a patrol of the area.

Operations in the Tsiknikhor area, which included the villages of Kamila, Tsiknikhor, Megalovo and Keratsino, were led by Stoyan Kamilski, one of the oldest and most experienced rebels in the militia of Georgi Kondolov, the most outstanding and experienced of the rebel commanders. The rebels' task in this area was to attack the Turkish garrison in the village of Tsikhnikhor. They split up into two groups and began their attack on 5th August shortly before midnight. The barracks were soon taken and the Turkish commander killed, but the next day two houses had to be burnt down because some of the last Turkish soldiers had barricaded themselves in and were still putting up resistance.

In the Igneada and Pirgopol areas the rebels' task was to take the village of Igneada and blow up the harbour lighthouse. This was undertaken on 8th August and the whole Strandzha was shaken by a mighty explosion. The Turkish garrison in the Greek village of Kosti panicked and the soldiers - about 80 of them - fled even before the rebels could attack. The Black Sea town of Akhtopol was also liberated. Here too the rebels were quick to inform the local population as to the reasons for the uprising and the tasks that had been set, and it elected its own provisional administration answerable to the rebels.

In the Gramatika area the uprising also began in the night of 5th August when 120 rebels launched an attack on the Turkish barracks which housed a garrison of 300 troops. The rebel militia was divided into five detachments, each with a precisely defined task. A furious battle ensued. The rebels withdrew to regroup and launch another attack. However, before they could attack again, the terrified Turkish soldiers left the barracks and fled. After this success the rebels also attacked the village of Poturnak and the communications post at Vizitsa. Two groups of the "death squad" from the village of Gramatikovo knocked down telegraph posts and destroyed the bridge over the River Veleka in the small village of Kachula.

In the Stoyilovo area the rebels' targets were the Turkish garrisons in the villages of Stoyilovo and Kalevo. Altogether there were 250 rebels in this area. The Turkish garrison in Stoyilovo was in two parts deployed separately - one was in the village while the other was encamped

further up the mountain towards the peak of St Elijah. Four rebel detachments took up their prearranged positions near Stoyilovo and prepared to attack. The Turkish soldiers heard the rumble of explosions and the fighting in the Gramatika area and were greatly alarmed. The rebels then launched their attack and the barrage of fire from all sides wrought havoc in the camp. On the morning of 6th August Turkish army reinforcements started arriving in the Stoyilovo area from Malko Turnovo and the rebels were forced to withdraw. But the soldiers in Stoyilovo itself were demoralized and abandoned the village, allowing the rebels to take it without a fight.

The garrison in Kalevo was attacked in the night of 9th-10th August. After heavy fighting the rebels made their way into the barracks and set them on fire. In panic the soldiers fled for Malko Turnovo, leaving storehouses of provisions behind them. Just several days into the uprising the whole area was in the hands of the rebels.

In the Zvezdets area major successes were achieved with great speed. The barracks in Zvezdets were set ablaze in the night of 5th-6th August and the soldiers forced to flee. Turkish reinforcements arrived on 8th August, but rebels positioned in the trenches around the barracks and hidden in nearby rocky outcrops beat them back. The soldiers thought they were surrounded, and panicked; they dropped everything - a boon of equipment and trophies for the rebels - and fled back towards Malko Turnovo with a group of rebels in hot pursuit. The rebels took the police stations in Konak and Surmashik, and barracks attached to border posts in the area were burnt down.

In the Derekyovo area with the villages of Derekyovo, Kuriyata, Karakoch, Pirok, Kadiyevo, Koyovo and including some villages of the Lozengrad district, military operations were led by Lazar Madzharov personally. There were 300 rebels, though many of them were only armed with axes and clubs. They were deployed and readied so as to be able to go into action simultaneously when the attack was launched on Derekyovo. The targets here were the barracks, the post office, the police station, and also the village coffee house where newly-arrived Turkish troops were spending the night. They were also to take control of the main roads to the neighbouring villages and to cut the telegraph and telephone lines to Lozengrad and Malko Turnovo. The other part of the rebel forces was meant to attack the garrison in the Turkish village of Kadiyevo exactly at midnight. But the rumbling of explosions in Paspalevo at around 10pm on 5th August made the Turkish troops scatter and the rebels took the initiative before the agreed time. The post office and the police station were taken and the coffee house was blown up. But the fighting in front of the barracks continued for some time. At around 9 o'clock in the morning Madzharov gave the order for the rebels to disengage and leave the village. On 7th August reinforcements of Turkish infantry arrived from Lozengrad. The rebels were forced to return to the camp "Markovets" where the rebels from Kovchas and Tursko Kadiyevo went after having successfully completed their mission, as well as a large number of rebels from the Lozengrad area. Altogether around 1,000 rebels were assembled there, but they were all poorly armed. For this reason it was decided to break camp and withdraw from the area.

In the operational region of Paspalevo the rebels were led by the commander Georgi Kondolov. They had three important tasks: to attack the garrison and take the village of Paspalevo, to take the Turkish village of Sazara, and to cut the telegraph lines connecting Malko Turnovo via Derekyovo with Lozengrad. There was a long battle with varied success. Although the beseiged Turks received reinforcements from Malko Turnovo, the rebels managed to take the police station. In the fighting the commander was seriously wounded. He was in excruciating pain and there was no possibility of giving him medical assistance or carrying him away due to the fight-

ing. Kondolov asked his comrades to kill him. After much hesitation the soldiers drew a straw and one of them shot him. Kondolov was later buried in the Paspalevo cemetery. The population of the district flocked there to pay their last respects to the commander and covered his grave with flowers.

In the Lozengrad district the operations were largely meant to assist the uprising in other areas. The main task was to disrupt the telegraph and telephone network and to prevent hostile forces from approaching Malko Turnovo. This task was fulfilled.

All in all the uprising in the first area of the district took on massive proportions and the military tasks were readily fulfilled. All the Turkish garrisons, excluding the one in Malko Turnovo, were taken. In the whole district the Turkish authorities were in panic, fearing attacks on Malko Turnovo, Lozengrad and even Odrin.

The goal of the uprising in Thrace was to assist the uprising in Macedonia by tying down Turkish military forces and preventing them from being transferred to Macedonia. Therefore in the other areas of Thrace the operations were of a diversionary nature and - assisted by acts of sabotage - were intended largely to have a psychological effect. Thus on 9th August in the second area centred around the village of Chochen the exceedingly brave and ruthless rebel commander Krustyu Bulgariyata and his militia attacked the village of Kadzhitalshman located 20 km from Odrin. In this attack, which was to become infamous for its brutality, a large number of grenades were used and many houses were set on fire. This sowed fear even among the Turkish cavalry, which turned and fled to Odrin.

In the third area centred around the town of Svilengrad the population was poorly armed and only the militia conducted operations.

In the fourth area centred around the villages of Dedeyagach and Gyumyurdzhiya it had been planned to conduct only acts of sabotage, but the authorities' vigilance and precautionary measures prevented many of the operations from being carried out. The most spectacular of the operations that succeeded was the attack on the railway station of Lüleburgas using a time-bomb produced in Gerdzhikov's house in Plovdiv. This attack was the work of Petar Mandzhukov and Milan Sazov, who placed the time-bomb in the train restaurant and then left the train. According to Mandzhukov's calculations the explosion should have taken place on the long bridge over the River Maritsa near Odrin. But the train was delayed by 13 minutes and the bomb exploded at Lüleburgas station as the train stood between two other trains full of troops to be transported to Macedonia. The trains were so badly damaged that they were unable to travel to Macedonia - a stunningly successful bombing.[20] According to evidence which became available at a later date, the Sultan Abdul Hamid himself stood by the court telegraphist all night long in order to receive fresh and precise information on the events in Thrace in general and in Lüleburgas in particular.

In the fifth area centred around the villages of Smolensko and Skechen, where the movement was well organized but poorly armed, the rebels conducted only guerilla-type operations with the aim of tying down the enemy's forces so as to facilitate operations in the first area.

This successful mass insurrection supported by militia operations and acts of sabotage allowed a large part of Eastern Thrace to be taken by the rebels. In the whole Strandzha region the pop-

[20] There is disagreement about the exact date of this act of sabotage. All researchers and participants in the attack give the date as being 13th August 1903. Mandzhukov, who is precise to the point of pedantry, mentions in his memoirs 5th August, backing it up with the following comment: "... exploded on the fifth..., this was interpreted both by the population in Thrace and by the Turkish authorities as a signal for the uprising". He mentions the source as being the French magazine "Illustration", no. 3152 of 18.9.1903, p. 168.

ulation celebrated for about three weeks. A new communitarian system was set up based on the principles of freedom, equality and solidarity. All questions were resolved in a spirit of mutual agreement and the old discord between Bulgarians and Greeks receded. Everyone together took part in burning the tax books. The Strandzha Commune lived and pulsated for more than 20 days in conditions of true communism - meaning an economic system, not a political regime - and in the absence of any kind of state power.

This is an interesting event in Bulgarian history - the creation of the Strandzha Commune was a spontaneous expression of the will of the people. The anarchists who were involved had great prestige and influence, but their numbers were small and they were not directly engaged in anarchist propaganda. It should be noted here that there was a significant difference between the approach of Gerdzhikov and that of the other members of the "Geneva Congress" who joined the movement. Merdzhanov and Mandzhukov, along with Sokolov and the "boatsmen"[21] were all active in anarchist groups and considered themselves separate from the IMRO. Kilifarski, Nunkov and Dechev also supported such independent anarchist activities. But Gerdzhikov, who remained an anarchist until the end of his life, merged fully with the wider liberation movement and did not participate in any small group which could have been qualified as "partisan". Likewise, all the other anarchists who participated in the IMRO were in the leadership or held positions of responsibility and carried out the decisions and tasks of the organization.

To date no thorough study has been done of the Strandzha Commune which many writers term a "republic" or "mini-state". Without a serious study of the events it is difficult to give a complete and exact description of the structure, functions and activities of that new and significant experiment in social transformation which arose out of an uprising for national and social liberation. However, researchers and interested readers will come across quite an abundance of relevant information in the memoirs of various participants of the Transfiguration uprising which allows us to at least sketch the physiognomy of the Strandzha Commune.

The libertarian character of the events at the time of the Transformation uprising is clearly reflected in the terminology used. Whereas in Macedonia, where anarchists also had a certain degree of influence, the leading body was termed the "General Staff", the analogous body in the Transfiguration uprising was called the "Leading Combat Body". The term "combat" suggests that it was a temporary leading body and would fulfill its tasks only so long as there was military activity. Clearly it does not refer to one single - albeit elected - central military command, but rather to a "body" tasked with coordinating revolutionary and military operations during the uprising.

"They decided against calling it General Staff out of modesty, and also so that it wouldn't reek of militarism", says Silyanov, a pupil of Gerdzhikov's at high school in Bitola and later his friend and admirer, who as far as we know was never an anarchist.

During the Transfiguration uprising the question of state power was never raised, and no decrees were issued. The population of the liberated villages nominated and elected not mayors and presidents, but commissioners from among their own number. The commissions were to administer, not to rule. Never was there any talk of establishing any authorities, albeit new ones. It was only emphasized that the "commissions" would function under the control of the rebel forces. This was quite natural and also a matter of necessity, because decisive power was now in the hands of the people in arms, and its fate was in its own hands.

[21] A group of militant anarchists who participated in the spectacular bombing of the Ottoman Bank in Thessa-

Gerdzhikov's relationship to the civil administration in the liberated areas is identical to that which was to characterize the Makhno movement in the Ukraine fifteen years later. In this respect Gerdzhikov can be considered a forerunner of the Makhnovists who also saw their army's task as auxiliary, temporary and transitional. They too left the issue of the social system to the councils which were chosen by the local population. One of the Makhnovists' appeals[22] to the population reads: "The revolutionary insurrectionary army sets itself the goal of helping the villagers and workers… and does not interfere with civil life… It urges the working population of the town and the surrounding to immediately begin independent organizational work…"

As far as the economic system of the Strandzha Commune was concerned, it can only be described as being libertarian communist.

According to Silyanov, communism as an economic system was already established during the preparations in the lead-up to the uprising. "The villagers found the idea most enticing," he writes, "and were quick to adopt it… In the space of just one year four villages were exceptionally well organized along communal lines. The young men did rifle practice and actively trained for the struggle while the unarmed villagers attended to the fields and livestock which was *no longer private property but belonged to the whole village and the organization.* Every day they brought in the harvest from the fields regardless of previous property relations, without considering whose fields they had once been. Once the food was processed it was put into storage, and from the storehouses a certain share was apportioned to needy villagers and the rebel fighters. Of course the poor, and that was the majority of the population, had nothing to lose from this way of things. On the contrary, they felt much better than they had before, when their tiny parcels of land or the few animals they had could be taken off them by the usurers in Akhtopol and Igneada… I have seen areas in Macedonia much better prepared for uprising than here in the Malko Turnovo area, but here *for the first time* I have seen the Commune… Yes, *on the eve of the uprising the Malko Turnovo area was indeed a true commune…* The farms were in common possession and every village had its own permanent military presence - a "death squad" supported by the remaining villagers."[23]

In his brief description of the initial successes of the uprising, Gerdzhikov writes: "We somehow began setting up our own institutions… The population was rejoicing, in the villages people danced and held feasts. There was no more *'This is mine and that is yours'* - in the hills and forests before and after the congress we had set up storehouses: the whole harvest was deposited there as flour and grain *in common stores.* The livestock also became common property… We issued an appeal to the ethnic Greek population in Greek explaining that in taking over territory *we weren't fighting for the re-establishment of a Bulgarian empire, but only for human rights*; we explained to them that as Greeks they too would benefit from this and it would be good if they would support us morally and materially…"[24]

Many of the participants in the uprising mention a particular example of the application of communist principles. Gerdzhikov also mentions one such case for illustration: "In Akhtopol there was a salt-cellar which had been run by the authorities. At that time there were 200,000 kg of salt there. We needed salt for the villages. Therefore I communicated (he doesn't say 'ordered'

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loniki in 1903.

[22] "To the Entire Working Population of the Town of Aleksandrovsk and the Surrounding Area", 7th October 1919 (document from the author's archive).

[23] Kh. Silyanov, Spomeni od Strandzha, p. 46-48.

[24] M. Gerdzhikov, Spomeni…, p. 75

or 'commanded', but simply 'communicated'; G.Kh.) to Angelov that he could disband the state-owned salt-cellar so that salt could be taken out and villagers could pick it up with carts and transport it back to their villages."[25]

And Petko Zidarov - deputy commander of Petur Angelov - adds: "We gave out four measures of salt for each family in the towns, and for villagers 10-15 cart-loads per village."

This reign of free communism was set up on the first day of the uprising and continued through until 21st August 1903, in some places until the end of the month, until it was crushed militarily by a 40,000-strong Ottoman army of infantry, cavalry and artillery.

The actual turn of events came on 25th August. The Turkish counter-offensive was conducted methodically, slowly, carefully, with encircling movements so as to surround the whole area under rebel control. When the rebels tried to engage in combat the Turkish troops avoided battle and withdrew almost immediately. But when they did attack, they sowed death and terror.

The rebel armed forces under the direct command of Gerdzhikov sought every opportunity to attack the Turkish army so as to delay its offensive for as long as possible and thus help the population to withdraw. "From all sides I was asked what to do," Gerdzhikov explains, "I answered that resistance should be offered for as long as possible, but that when enemy forces seemed overwhelming all that was possible should be done to save the population from slaughter."

Villages were evacuated. The whole population - women, children and the aged - left their houses carrying household items and drawing livestock along behind them. They moved off towards Bulgaria from where they hoped military assistance would come. Their hopes were in vain.

In the 40 substantial clashes of the Transformation uprising there were 38 rebels casualties compared with 314 Turks killed. In addition to the 2,000-4,000 rebel fighters the uprising was joined by Bulgarians and Greeks from 92 Christian villages with 17,754 houses. When the uprising was put down and quashed 2,610 houses in 66 villages were burnt down. 12,880 people were left homeless, 2,565 were killed or executed, 20,000 became refugees.

The quashing of the uprising was particularly brutal in Eastern Thrace. The number of victims and of houses razed was proportionally higher than in Macedonia, and the repression was much more brutal here. This was due to the fact that the Ottoman empire was close to collapsing and the Sultan, ruling autocratically, could not come to terms with the events. An uprising by infidel subjects before the very gates of his capital, Istanbul, was particularly intolerable. Maybe the rebellious population's awareness of their special location and of this exceptional juncture was another reason for their great courage, for declaring not only their national liberation but also striving for a social revolution in a spirit of internationalism.

The rebel operations in the Ottoman empire during the Transformation uprising of 1903 and the reaction of the Turkish military units and police authorities allow several basic conclusions to be drawn:

1. Despite the mass participation of the population in the uprising the rebel militias played the decisive role in military terms. But this was not enough to ensure victory. The majority of the people drawn to the movement had little or no military training and were not very firm in military terms; furthermore, they were poorly armed;

[25] Ibid., p. 76.

2. It is undeniable that successes were achieved, albeit for a short period, against an enemy which was well armed and much more numerous. Therefore this was the not a victory of superior weapons but rather the result of the rebels' enthusiasm, their swift action, and the fear they sowed among the Turkish troops. Even after initially unsuccessful attacks against Turkish garrisons and the withdrawal of the rebels, the soldiers sometimes ran away;

3. The flow of information was inadequate - there were underestimates and overestimates of the strength of each side. Thus, for example, if the weakness of Turkish forces in Malko Turnovo had been known when the uprising was launched, the rebels would surely have taken it in the first few days;

4. The fact that the impending uprising was successfully kept secret added to the element of surprise, creating confusion and even instilling a degree of fear in the local Turkish authorities;

5. Despite the excellent organizational talent and high degree of fighting spirit among the rebel leadership, the military training of the rebels themselves was anything but thorough or refined. The Turkish regular army, however, although well trained and equipped, was far from being perfect either. Describing one battle, Gerdzhikov explains: "At first the shells were all landing behind or in front of our position. It turned out that the Turks couldn't determine the range properly. And when they began firing fragmentation bombs they all landed behind us. This bombardment continued until evening and not one single Turkish infantryman showed his face. Evidently *the Turks were duds at artillery."*

6. The Transformation uprising of 1903 sprung from a broad popular movement. The decisive role in its effectiveness (however temporary) was played not by military strategy, technology or training but by the *revolutionary aspirations and enthusiasm, the particular spirit of self-sacrifice* of all the participants, especially those rebels experienced in guerilla warfare.

The movement's structure with a Leading Combat Body enabled broad popular initiative at the local level, but at the same time the body did not show the necessary initiative of its own. This was particularly true of its members Ikonomov and Madzharov, although they were no less brave, daring or devoted than Gerdzhikov. Possibly it was their revolutionary outlook which resulted in them showing less practical initiative. These differences were hard for Gerdzhikov to cope with - this comes out between the lines of his memoirs as recounted by professor Miletich. It cannot be ruled out that the remaining leaders perhaps saw Gerdzhikov as a de-facto commander-in-chief, something which Gerdzhikov neither wished to be nor considered necessary for conducting a popular uprising.

The Aftermath of the Uprisings

The St Elijah's Day and Transformation uprisings of 1903, "an unequal struggle for the equal right to live and be free", lasted two months and ended in defeat. The insurrectionary people demonstrated and affirmed their aspirations, their striving for national and social liberation. At the same time the idea arose of restructuring the socio-economic system in the spirit of communism - people showed not only bravery but also the will and capacity to create institutions of democratic people's power.

But the experiment was drowned in blood. The repression led to countless victims, suffering and material loss - hundreds of villages were affected, thousands of houses burnt down. The number of people executed, tortured or made homeless went into the tens of thousands.

This repression was soon used by the liberation movement as the basis for launching a campaign against Turkish policy as well as to collect material aid and channel moral support to the population of Macedonia and Thrace and to all those forced to flee from those regions.

In response to the report by Gruyev, Sarafov and Lozanchev on 9th September the Bulgarian government sent a note to the Great Powers in which it strongly condemned the repression and brutalities in Macedonia and Thrace, but fearing war in the Balkans it did not undertake any serious countermeasures. The whole Bulgarian people held mass meetings, rallies and protest marches in a whole series of cities and villages in support of their oppressed fellow Bulgarians living under Ottoman rule.

The Great Powers sat back to watch the development of events, each mindful of securing its own position and sphere of influence. By means of the Mürzsteg reforms of 3rd October 1903 Russia and Austria anticipated the reform of the Turkish gendarmerie with the aid of foreign officers and by including a certain number of Christian police officers. Together with these reforms the Turkish government committed itself to disbanding the bashi-bazouks and using these funds to repair the destroyed villages.

But Europe's passivity gave Turkey a free hand in putting down the uprising and carrying out its brutal policies. Of course, throughout Europe there were also groups and organizations which were concerned about the sufferings and the unhappy fate of the population of Macedonia and Thrace.

The leaders of the uprising were faced with the serious task of taking stock, of searching for the reasons for failure and of learning the lessons to be learned.

The circumstances necessitated a meeting of all the leaders of the movement who had survived the quashing of the uprising. They came together for consultations in Sofia in October 1903. The Leading Combat Body members Gerdzhikov, Ikonomov and Madzharov took part; Silyanov was also present. The latter two arrived late because they had been searched by the Bulgarian authorities and had had to hide some of their weapons. Yane Sandaski, Chernopeyev and Chakalarov were also present at the meeting, although they had not participated in the uprising. Sandanski harshly criticized the premature launch of the uprising and tried to find out who had been directly responsible and who had supported the move. Of those present he and Stefanov formed the left wing, to which Gerdzhikov also belonged. Gerdzhikov was the most prominent of the leftists, whereas Sarafov was the leader of the right wing. This awoke Stefanov's rivalry. At the meeting Sarafov declared that he had been delegated by the population of the Bitola area to go abroad to solicit aid and above all to raise money. He neither wanted to nor was able to present a written mandate for such a mission. Gerdzhikov saw the initiative as being of a private nature and emphasized that it would reveal too much about the organization.

Gerdzhikov's position made him unpopular and an embarrassment both to various people on the left with leadership ambitions, and also to Sarafov, who himself already felt he stood above the organization. One evening after the meeting Gerdzhikov was waylaid, arrested, and immediately taken for internment to Plovdiv. He had been about to follow an invitation of Tatarchev and Matov to go to Sarafov's. They had been trying hard to convince him to go abroad with Sarafov in order to keep an eye on him. Gerdzhikov was of the view that Tatarchev was better suited to the task because he knew several foreign languages and would be a good "diplomat". He felt that their proposal to send both himself and Sarafov abroad was motivated by a desire to seize the leadership of the organization.

Ten days after Gerdzhikov had been interned in Plovdiv Tatarchev, Matov and Stefanov came again - this time in the name of Tushe Deliivanov - with the task of convincing Gerdzhikov to go abroad. Finally Gerdzhikov agreed, but under the condition that the organization issue a general mandate which was always to be acted upon by two comrades so that neither of them could act independently of the other in the name of the organization.

Gerdzhikov left secretly for Belgrade in order to meet up with Sarafov who arrived there 4-5 days later.

In his memoirs, which were written up and published by L. Miletich, Gerdzhikov gives a description of that journey. The description is so laconic, however, that readers are left to try and grasp Sarafov's rather disloyal relationship to the organization themselves. It came out that Sarafov was hiding and holding conspirative meetings, and that in Belgrade he was gathering together people for demonstrations so as to aggrandize himself. In Vienna he and Gerdzhikov had instructions from the organization to refrain from holding any political meetings. Here, quite by chance, Sarafov was caught red-handed meeting in secret with a certain Count Goluhovsky, and Gerdzhikov did not miss the occasion to unmask him, though with due caution. In his memoirs, poorly written and devoid of his otherwise absorbing style, Gerdzhikov gives little detail which would illuminate the course of events for us.

Perhaps this is the juncture for a brief aside regarding the movement in Macedonia and Thrace - the not insignificant issue of agents, provocateurs and traitors in the organization.

A feature of every revolutionary movement is that it has different ideas on methods of struggle, the type of leadership suitable for that struggle, and relations with other organizations and forces near and far. In dealing with these differences there is the danger of facts being exaggerated, of their meaning being altered or even totally perverted. For this reason we should recognize that not everyone declared an agent or a traitor always was one, even if they were found to be so by a tribunal. It is fair to expect this insight from an objective historian - they should "put the brakes on" when they see the truth being carried away in the runaway train of ideological fervour.

It is an indisputable fact that the Bulgarian monarch and court had agents in the movement in Macedonia and Thrace. It is also true that, through their actions, many people consciously or unwittingly served those agents. But there were also quite a few people who were accused of being agents when in fact they were simply acting in accordance with their convictions and sincerely hoped that they were furthering the cause. Whatever their failings, these people amply proved their devotion to the cause, showing bravery and self-sacrifice.

This may be the stage to pose an uncomfortable question which we simply cannot give a definite answer to: the question of Sarafov. Gerdzhikov has written about him, and we have no reason to doubt Gerdzhikov's objectivity even for a second. The question is: was Sarafov, who was so frequently accused of being an agent of the Bulgarian prince Ferdinand and then liquidated, not perhaps one of the group of people mentioned, who simply believed they were doing the right thing for the cause?

There is another important question which deserves attention - that of the social-democrats' attitude towards the revolutionary liberation movement in Macedonia and Thrace. "At best indifferent, at worst completely negative", said Gerdzhikov shortly before his death in March 1947, putting it in a nutshell. He illustrated the case with concrete examples, like the instance of the Mayday celebrations where the Macedonian revolutionary Gotse Delchev arrived with a group of representatives from Macedonia, later joined by Gerdzhikov, to take part in a demonstration to show that they fighting for social rights as well as struggling for national liberation. The demon-

stration was supposed to end with a rally in the old circus ring opposite the baths. Delchev persuaded Gerdzhikov to speak for the Macedonians and Thracians. He told this to Georgi Bakalov who replied that he would have to go and ask the organizers; a little while later Bakalov reported back, saying that no such speaker had been planned for the rally. Delchev was furious and promptly left the demonstration together with his entire group. That incident is worth mentioning to the social-democrats today who go to ridiculous lengths trying to portray Delchev as a social-democrat.

Another example relates to Dimitur Blagoyev - the founder and grand old man of Bulgarian socialism. He lived in Plovdiv and was an old friend of Gerdzhikov's. After the wave of repression in Macedonia Gerdzhikov met up with Blagoyev and asked him: "You're a Macedonian - how can you be indifferent to all the repression in Macedonia? Why don't we organize a protest meeting? The two of us can speak, you as a socialist and me as an anarchist." Blagoyev willingly accepted. A very successful mass meeting with over 1,000 participants was held, which was truly significant for an event of that time and generated good coverage and positive reactions in the press.

The next day the two met again and Blagoyev said to Gerdzhikov: "What trouble you've made for me with your Macedonian protests, Mike! Today Georgi Kirkov called me on the phone and gave me a good talking to! Why do you have to get mixed up in things like that? Our struggle is the class struggle and we can't have anything to do with the national liberation of the Macedonians. That will come by itself when the social revolution comes."[26]

After giving these examples Gerdzhikov continues his tale about his journey with Sarafov.

"Our mission," he said, "was not just to search for financial support, as I had understood Sarafov to mean. Why so many meetings with all manner of counts, friends of the Serbian King and members of his court, as well as various other open and secret enemies of our cause? We should have been contacting prominent public figures and politicians in the West, through whom we would conduct a campaign to generate moral support for the terrorized population of Macedonia. Indeed there were some such meetings. In Paris we saw Jean Jaurès who received us with great kindness and promised us his unreserved support. When we said goodbye he said: 'Say hello to my friend Sakuzov and tell him that I don't understand the indifference of the Bulgarian social-democrats, what with them standing aside and not supporting such a significant popular movement!' "

Rather than taking the question of the social-democrats to its logical conclusion, in his memoirs Gerdzhikov changes the topic somewhat. "I have long been concerned with a different question, and since I've broached the topic, let me say something about it now: we anarchists suffer from an excess of moral scruples. When we are disgusted by the stance of others, instead of removing the gangrene with the surgical knife of criticism we prefer to pack our bags and go, slamming the door behind us. In my own case I still ask myself whether I really did the right thing or whether I made mistakes?"

To explain what he means Gerdzhikov continues to relate the tour of Europe in considerable detail. Many meetings were held in London, and increasingly Gerdzhikov was angered and frustrated with peddling the misfortune of the Macedonians so as to raise funds. One evening a

[26] It is worth recalling that this was 1903, some years before the Russian Revolution, and the distinctions between anarchism and Marxism were not necessarily always clear. The level of industrialization in the southern Balkans was very low and the vast majority of the population were peasants and artisans - oppressed working people by all means, but largely under conditions of feudalism or primitive, post-feudal capitalism. The industrial or agro-industrial working class seems to have been small. Once again, there are parallels here with the Ukraine in Makhno's times. (Trans.)

Japanese diplomat arrived at the hotel. At first Gerdzhikov thought he was a journalist. After exchanging polite formalities characteristic of the Japanese, the diplomat expressed his own "deep sympathy" and that of "the entire Japanese people" for the liberation struggle of the Macedonians. In the name of the government of "the land of the rising sun" he pledged their support for this "just cause" and promised unlimited supplies of arms which would be delivered to a port to be designated by Gerdzhikov. The diplomat also promised financial aid, and at that very meeting he was prepared to hand over a total of 100,000 pounds sterling.[27]

Gerdzhikov was alone with the diplomat. He politely expressed thanks but declined the offer, saying that as a representative he would first have to consult the organization and also confer with his comrade who was not present at the moment. Gerdzhikov then expressed his great surprise at this "noble gesture" and asked the diplomat what "higher motives" or superior state interests of a very distant country could motivate such a "kind" offer of assistance for his people's revolutionary struggle for its freedom. He repeated this view, emphasizing the words "revolution" and "freedom". The Japanese diplomat again underlined his sympathies for the Macedonians and added that he had already received the consent of the other representative of the organization. At this point in the tale Gerdzhikov said with a smile: "How generous the Japanese are! And what pains Sarafov had to go to - in vain, as it turned out - to obtain even a modicum of goodwill from the English. They were only lured into potentially giving financial aid by being guaranteed that after the liberation of Macedonia - wait for it - ... they would be entitled to fish in Lake Ohrid!"

Concluding his recollections of the meeting with the Japanese diplomat, Gerdzhikov said: "While I was there alone, and in the course of the European trip, I thought long and hard about why our cause should be the focus of such kind attention from a country whose monarch made his subjects revere him as a demigod and who held his people in the same grip of servitude as the Ottomans did us."

"The mystery was revealed a little later with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Japan had aimed to fuel and spread conflicts in the Balkans in order to involve Russia and help tie down its forces, which in turn would facilitate Japan's own expansive plans. The 'admiration' shown by the Japanese diplomat for the heroism of the people of Macedonia and Thrace thus was only a pretext and had no real meaning at all. Every state makes its imperialist calculations and is indifferent to bloodshed, suffering, and the ruined lives of people."

Later in his intimate memoirs Gerdzhikov deals with his trip to Italy. There, as in all other places, he held meetings and discussions, conducted press conferences and issued statements. The entire Italian press reported on his visit. One socialist newspaper, conjecturing about Gerdzhikov's eye defect which had resulted from an operation, described in detail how tears came to Gerdzhikov's eyes as he described the tragedy of the Macedonian people. The same paper did not hesitate to mention that these eminent revolutionaries were sitting around in expensive hotels where otherwise only the nobility could afford to stay.

"When I read the papers," Gerdzhikov notes with indignation, "I exploded with rage. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. The socialist journalist was right - were expensive hotels the place for us?! Sarafov had been in charge of the finances during the trip. Not once had I made a remark about his exorbitant spending of money. He made all kinds of promises that it would change, and then went on spending the same way as before. This got on my nerves pretty badly,

[27] The original says 100,000 "lira sterling", which in the given context of London presumably meaning pounds sterling rather than silver Turkish lira... (Trans.)

and this time my indignation knew no limit. There was another bone of contention too - under some pretext Sarafov had taken our general mandate, which under the set mandate ought to have always been in my possession, and refused to give it back. I was infuriated and immediately demanded of Sarafov that we sort the matter out."

When Sarafov returned from his mysterious meetings Gerdzhikov showed him the article in the newspaper and thundered: "How many times have I told you that we have to be modest? We are representing a people which at the moment doesn't even have bread to eat and is being terrorized by the Turks. And here we are globetrotting like princes and pretending to be great statesmen! And what are your mysteries? In Belgrade you arrange a meeting with members of the royal family. In Vienna you meet up with counts, enemies of our cause, and lead me astray by telling me you were meeting up with old girlfriends. In London there were more meetings, again without my knowledge or agreement. We've had our share of little scandals but we haven't raised funds. Begging for aid from the Church and from suspicious characters absolutely foreign to our revolutionary cause… When is this all going to stop?"

Unruffled by this energetic protest, Sarafov took the mandate out of his pocket, tore it up and threw it into the stove. "I don't need that mandate," he said, "I have another which is much weightier."

"In a flash I drew my pistol," Gerdzikov recalls, "I was about to shoot him on the spot. But I got a grip on myself again and remembered where we were and what the reaction would be in the West to such a scandal… At that moment I also made the decision to withdraw from the movement… Up until today I don't know whether that was the right thing to do. As I see it, this way of behaving has gone from being a purely personal issue - a personal drama - to become a question of the overall social behaviour of anarchists. That's the way we're become, that's the way we are. I feel we suffer from an excess of scruples. Even after the uprising was crushed the struggle was not over and was not hopeless. We had paid dearly in the struggle, and we anarchists had shown unsurpassed heroism. After Gotse Delchev's death I, his closest comrade, was seen by the revolutionaries as the most able leader with an unstained reputation. It seemed to me that if I used that influence, assisted by good comrades, I would be able to deal with the external forces, especially those interfering with the movement, and successfully continue the struggle. But scruples - those tortuous moral scruples - prevented me from continuing. I was still an anarchist above all else and the thought of playing the role of leader was something I abhorred. What was more, I couldn't come to terms with the idea that we were pawns in the hands of powers hostile to our cause. This idea was not totally new to me - I knew that Ferdinand had agents in our movement. But I had always hoped we would be able to get rid of them and that our movement would remain clean and autonomous. The trip to the West finally opened my eyes. Sarafov's actions allowed me to see the abysmal reality, against which all our revolutionary efforts were powerless. I would never have thought that people like Sarafov, whose weaknesses I knew but who had also showed heroism, self-sacrifice and devotion to the cause, would have mandates "weightier" that those of the organization… My disillusionment and sense of revulsion became unbearable. I decided to withdraw from the active struggle so as not to be a pawn in the hands of powers hostile to our cause."

Gerdzhikov fell silent, the issue still hung in the air. Even I couldn't find the strength to say to him: "Yes, Mike, you did the right thing." The foul intrigues of the power-hungry are stronger than our limitless honesty. It is our fate to give of ourselves in this way, to serve as a seed of the future. Yes, our mangnanimity will be exploited by others, that's the way it has been and that's

the way it always will be. Our victory - the final victory - will be the seed out of which a better future will grow. And no-one can suppress it.

Perhaps one month after these memoirs were recorded Gerdzhikov died on 18th March 1947 - a memorable date linked to the history of the Paris Commune.

Lessons to be Learnt

Along with presenting the methods of the national liberation struggle in Macedonia and Thrace, this study also looks at the lessons to be learnt from those revolutionary events. In general terms these lessons can be divided into those concerning *ideology and tactics*, allowing us to outline the most fundamental and significant contours of an ideology; and those which are *organizational/practical* in nature, concerning the anti-authoritarian movement and closely related to it.

The St Elijah's Day and Transfiguration uprisings, including all the preparations and the operations leading up to them, were very costly in terms of human lives. The population of Macedonia and Thrace invested great resources and energy in its struggle for freedom, only in the end to be the victim of great suffering. So much was done by the local population and so much assistance was given by comrades in Bulgaria, and in the end the goal of the liberation of the enslaved ethnic Bulgarian areas was not attained.

The conclusions for the revolutionary struggle and its methods would be pessimistic if we disregarded the complex situation in the Balkans and did not go into the other factors involved. For all the Herculean efforts of the revolutionary movement the circumstances combined in an unfavourable way to seal the fate of the struggle.

The problem of the national liberation of the population of Macedonia and Thrace remains unresolved up until this day. Although it is true that this population no longer lives under Turkish feudal rule, even today it is divided, forming part of the population of Bulgaria, Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Turkey.

The assassination attempts and other terrorist attacks carried out in these last years of the Ottoman empire did not follow the goal of national liberation directly. Rather, their goal was to attract international attention - above all that of Europe - to the fact that the population of Macedonia and Thrace remained under despotic foreign rule, a fact which either was unknown or overlooked. The bombings and acts of sabotage were also intended to raise the consciousness of the Macedonian minority in the empire which had trodden the path of subservience, reminding them that they were Bulgarians and ought to rise up and fight for their freedom.

The St Elijah's Day and Transfiguration uprisings ended in failure - Macedonia and Thrace were not liberated - but a mortal blow was dealt to the collapsing feudal empire. The very foundations of the Sultan's empire were shaken. The Young Turk movement was founded. Internal reforms were introduced and carried through in the empire, though they were far from satisfactory for the Bulgarian-ethnic population.

The Balkan War soon followed, culminating in 1913 with almost all of the occupied territories being freed from the Turkish Empire. But instead of these former Ottoman possessions becoming autonomous war broke out between the former anti-Ottoman allies - ironically in the name of peace in the Balkans - and the possessions were carved up and annexed as a result of the Great Powers' eternally antagonistic interests.

The question of the nationality of the population of Macedonia and Thrace has yet to be resolved. If it is not resolved it will only be exacerbated and will again culminate in a crisis due to the Balkan states' passion for annexing new territories.

The fact that a multi-ethnic federal solution has not been achieved is largely due to the Western states' fear of the Russian sphere of influence - be it is Tsarist or later Bolshevik - extending southwards into the Balkans. On the other hand Russia itself managed to block the formation of a Balkan federation which it feared would hinder its aspirations to extend to the Mediterranean.

In other words, the fate of the formerly Ottoman lands and their population was determined above all by the states striving for power. This will to power is a distinguishing mark of every state, be it feudal, monarchist or republican, be it capitalist or socialist: it is a motor force behind the very existence of the state as such.

The same striving for power also dictates the behaviour of the small states in the Balkans, which not only did not unite, but left the territories of Macedonia and Thrace to become a bone of contention. Even today the political problem of the Macedonian and Thracian population still needs to be resolved, and the social aspect of this problem is even more serious.

In all of the Balkan states nationalist poison has constantly been injected into public discourse and artificially maintained in an appropriate dosage in the consciousness of citizens over generations. Nationalism is a well-tried instrument, as too is religion, for maintaining each state's striving for power.

Historians know how national groups are constructed, and it would be superfluous to digress into history to establish and prove the national identity of the population of Thrace and Macedonia. There are a great number of quite convincing arguments which enable us to maintain the nationality of the people living in these territories. The population of Macedonia and Thrace has predominantly considered itself Bulgarian[28], and this has been shown throughout its entire historical development and above all in its revolutionary struggles. After the fascists and monarchists were deposed towards the end of the Second World War a new "nation" was artificially established under the influence of the Comintern - Macedonia. This was a negative, retrograde and reactionary step which did not aim to unite peoples but rather to divide them. The local population rejected the idea at the time, but in the years that followed a propaganda campaign was unleashed which after several years indeed started taking effect, and many people indeed started to consider themselves "Macedonians"[29]. This was not the only such instance in Bulgar-

[28] Here and throughout this piece the term ”Bulgarian” is used as a blanket term to mean both ethnic Bulgarians and ethnic Macedonians - southern Slavs - as distinct from the many other ethnic groups in the geographical region of Macedonia. The degree of cultural and linguistic similarity between Macedonians and Bulgarians is very high and it was only in the second half of the 20th century with the creation of a discrete Macedonian republic within Yugoslavia that clear linguistic and cultural distinctions between ”Bulgarians” and ”Macedonians” began to emerge and be codified. So here when the author uses the term Bulgarian he often means Macedonian, unless referring directly to the autonomous Principality of Bulgaria and the majority ethnic group there. (Trans.)

[29] The author essentially looks on Macedonians as poor estranged Bulgarians. This point of view is rather chauvinist and echoes the official Bulgarian position; it is also contentious because it neglects the extent to which the Bulgarians’ fellow Slavs in Macedonia even a century ago had developed unique linguistic features, for example, which after the creation of the new Macedonian state were simply formalized and codified. Divergent cultural phenomena between geographical Macedonia and geographical Bulgaria could also be cited… In his justified criticism of the artificial creation of a Macedonian state the author fails to mention the extent to which Bulgarian identity and language have also been artificially shaped by the Bulgarian state, the Church, etc. This deserves critical analysis too. Anarchists, it seems, are not automatically immune to national bias and should be careful not to swallow the ethnic policies of the state they were born in or live in… See also note 4. (Trans.)

ian history. Are the Pomaks not also ethnic Bulgarians forcibly converted to Islam? Today their sense of identity leads them to consider themselves Turks, or at least to feel that they practice an alien religion.

A political solution to the significant problem of Macedonia and Thrace - these two geographical regions with their exceedingly mixed population - is only possible through a federation of the Balkan peoples, which they would participate in as autonomous territorial units.

From a ideological/tactical point of view we can ask the following questions: are national revolutions and revolutionary national liberation movements compatible with socialist internationalism, i.e. with the struggle for social liberation and reconstruction through social revolution?

In practice Bulgarian libertarians gave an unmistakably affirmative answer to this question in all their work, above all through their active participation in the revolutionary movement in Macedonia and Thrace. This same affirmative answer was confirmed and proven by the broad national liberation movements which spread in the colonies of European powers in the years following the Second World War.

The struggle to liberate Macedonia and Thrace from the political domination of the Ottoman Turks was clearly socialist in nature. This was because feudalism was the basis of the Ottoman system of political power. The toppling of authorities perceived as alien led to the destruction of the social fabric of feudal rule which enslaved the non-Turkish ethnic groups and also the majority of Turks.

This feature of foreign domination is also clearly visible in the colonial countries of the so-called Third World where the struggle for national independence cannot be considered separately from the struggle for social liberation.

Clearly it is indisputable that every kind of political liberation can lead to a resurgence of nationalism. A social exploiter of foreign origin is replaced by one of domestic origin who is often in league with foreign capital. Nevertheless, the social achievements that come with national liberation cannot be denied, and they whet people's appetite for even greater ones. In the end, through the arousal of a higher level of consciousness and above all after overcoming the period of nationalist obsession with its accompanying illusions, the basis is laid for a radical phase of social reconstruction - social revolution.

Even if one believes that true freedom can only be brought about by social revolution and social liberation, to distance oneself from significant national liberation struggles or to take no interest in them is to retreat from reality, from the social responsibilities of a revolutionary socialist[30] and internationalist. Only when revolutionary socialists connect their life and activity with the struggle of their people for national and social liberation do they serve the class struggle and the social-revolutionary idea of a fundamental reconstruction of society.

The other lesson to be learnt from the participation of Bulgarian anarchists in the national liberation struggles in Macedonia and Thrace is that they closely linked their work as anarchists with the popular movement. They invested much energy in this struggle and made great sacrifices, but this potential was not realized well or to the full. The libertarian idea had taken root among the Bulgarians back in the days of Khristo Botev (1849-1876) and was well suited to the mentality of the population which preserved centuries-old traditions containing elements of libertarian com-

[30] Khadzhiev uses this term in a broad sense to include anarchists, perhaps even to mean anarchists in particular. Remember that this was before the Russian Revolution and the demarcation between the different strands of revolutionary socialism was not as clear-cut as it was to be later. (Trans.)

munism. In the late 19th and early 20th century the development of anarchist thought in Bulgaria trailed behind that of Marxism. This is no wonder, because the Bulgarian anarchists linked their struggle so closely with the revolutionary movement for the liberation of the people of Macedonia and Thrace from foreign domination. The task of developing a discrete, organized anarchist movement was considered less important and not made a priority until later on. It should also be mentioned that the anarchists made a great contribution to the creation and development of the union movement in Bulgaria.

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